2: Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

ness; in others, that perplexed manner common in people of weak intellect. The women appear sharper and quicker than the men, unless it be that they have less *mauvais honte*, and acquit themselves better before company, but they are the most ordinary specimens of the sex I ever saw.*

The Veddahs bear a very striking resemblance to each other—both in feature and expression. And this is especially remarkable among those of Nilgala, who have preserved their ancient customs more completely than their brethren of Bintenne, who live in a less secluded country, have been able to do.

Their clothing—so to speak—is the most scanty conceivable. A scrap of dirty cloth, scarcely larger than the paper on which I write, supported in front by a string round the waist, being a complete Veddah suit for male or female; for the rag that does duty for crinoline, is scarcely less diminutive than that which represents the male garments† . Indeed, almost the only difference in the costume of the men and women is, that the latter have their ears pierced, and wear in the lobes round studs of ivory.

Neither sex is remarkable for personal cleanliness, and with their rugged unkempt locks half obscuring their features, the Veddahs certainly realize all one's preconceived notions of the most barbarous savages.

Knox's picture of "a Vadda, or Wild Man" is a fancy portrait, and decidedly flattering. They do not "tye their hair on their crowns in a bunch", nor do they indulge in nearly so much drapery or beard as is worn by that stout well-to-do-looking gentleman, who is placidly smoking an imaginary pipe, for smoking is a luxury at which the Veddahs have not yet arrived. The contrast between Knox's idea of the wild men, and their actual appearance, is amusing.

When brought in from their forests to be "looked at," they huddle themselves together like a herd of wild and timid animals driven into a corner from which there is no escape. Attract their attention by a present of rice or cloth, and in an instant they become like eager children, scrambling for a new toy,—forget the presence of strangers, and intent only on what is before them, jostle each other, clamouring for a fair division of the spoil, and complaining loudly against those of their companions whom they suspect of having got more than their share of the good things.

But it is not fair to judge of them when so utterly out of their

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* I saw some of them display the liveliest curiosity at the sight of their "white sisters", two remarkably good specimens of whom found their way to Nilgala in 1857.

† Formerly the sacking-like bark of the "Riti tree" (*antiaris innoxia*, or *A. saccidora*) supplied the place of cloth; and bags made of this fibrous bark are still used by the Singhalese for carrying rice, etc.

2:Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
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element as they are in the midst of a civilized crowd. They are different beings at ease in their own forests. I have travelled by night with Veddahs for my guides over the plains and through the forests of Bintenne, and have been struck with their altered demeanour. In their own hunting grounds, they are no longer the scared and cowering creatures I have described. They are "at home;" and seem to assert their freedom. Bows in hand, their axes hanging from their shoulders, they stride noiselessly along, with head erect, and independent air as though they were every one's equal, and had none to fear.

As their chief pursuit is hunting, whether for game or honey, their constant weapons, without which they never stir, are a bow, two or three arrows, and a very small axe (for cutting honey-combs out of trunks of trees), shaped with a hollow in the lower part of the blade to enable it to hang conveniently upon the shoulder. They also carry a larger axe, stuck into the waist-string at their back.

The bow is long, from five feet eight to about six feet six inches in length, rudely made of tough elastic wood*—a bow, which a muscular Englishman would bend with an effort, long practice has taught the slightly-built Veddah to string with ease; and I have seen a boy use a bow which caused me some exertion to bend. The strings, which are exceedingly strong, are twisted of different kinds of bark and fibres.† The arrows, which are about a yard long, are headed with a sharp iron blade, often nearly six inches long and an inch wide, about the formation of which they are still as "curious" as when Knox wrote of them, and if a blade be given them, they will now, as they did then, grind or beat it out to the shape and thinness they most approve.‡

The method in which "they bespeak their arrows to be made," and their mode of barter generally, which Tennent believes still to exist among them, have long been exploded.§ They are not

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* They chiefly use the wood of the following trees, doonoomadala (*stereospermum chelonoides*), the kekala (*cyathocalyx zeylanicus*), a creeper called kobbówel, or the pandóre tree.

† Chiefly the fibre of the niyanda (*sansiviera zeylanica*), and the bark of a creeper called the areloowel.

‡ "They are so curious of their arrows that no smith can please them. The king once to gratify them for a great present they brought him, gave all of them his best made arrow-blades, which nevertheless would not please their humour. For they went all of them to a rock by a river, and ground them into another form." Knox, part iii, chap. i, p. 63 (folio).

§ "It hath been reported to me by many people, that a wilder sort of them, when they want arrows, will carry their loads of flesh in the night; and hang it up in a smith's shop, also a leaf cut in the form they will have their arrows made and hang by it; which if the smith do make according to their pattern, they will requite, and bring him more flesh; but if he make

2:Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

They are very rude in their cookery, often burning the flesh in the fire, which they produce by rubbing together two pieces of the wood of the vellan tree (*Pterospermum suberifolium*, Sam.). A hole is scooped in one piece with an arrow-blade, and the other, which is pointed, is inserted into it, and twirled rapidly round between the hands till it ignites.

They are fond of betel, when they can get it; but in lieu of the compound which goes by this name, they have the following substitutes. Instead of the betel leaf, they eat the astringent bark of the demette tree (*Gmelina Asiatica, L.*), or the leaves of an aromatic plant called the madurutala (*Ocimum sanctum*—or *O. canum, L.*) For areka nut, they chew the bark of the moratree (*Nephelium longanum*, Camb.), the oupaloo or wellan connitta tree; and calcined snail shells, or the bark of the areloo tree (*Terminalia chebula*, Retz.), supplies the place of lime or chunam, which forms so important an ingredient in a prepared quid of betel. They do not smoke, and are very temperate, drinking water only.

I need not say that they are very simple and primitive in their habits. The "wilder sort" have had too little communication with the Singhalese to have acquired the vices of civilization. The few necessaries of life which the forest does not supply, such as steel and iron for their arrow-heads and axes, and the very scanty clothing which they wear, they obtain by barter, their wax and honey, elk flesh, and ivory, being eagerly sought after by the neighbouring Singhalese, or "the ubiquitous Moors."

They are very harmless, too; though, according to Knox, were much dreaded once. Even yet there are traditions that they kidnapped children, ran off with young girls, way-laid travellers, and attacked the tavalams or bullock-caravans. But now, at any rate, they are as peaceful as it is possible to be. They are proverbially truthful and honest. They are fond of their children, who early become useful to them; the boys soon are familiar with the use of the bow, while the girls, armed with a pointed stick, add to the family larder at a very tender age, by killing the iguano, and digging for wild yams.

Their constancy to their wives is a very remarkable trait in their character in a country where conjugal fidelity is certainly not classed as the highest of domestic virtues. Infidelity, whether in the husband or the wife, appears to be unknown, and I was

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kadura (*strychnos, nux vomica*), the diwi kaduru (*taberna montana dichotoma*, Roxb.), the kolong (*nauclea cordifolia*, Roxb.), the milla (*vitex altissima*, Linn.), the mora (*nephelium longanum*, Camb.), the kaluwera (ebony, *ebenum*, Retz), which they say would stupify them; but though the three first mentioned trees would be injurious, it is probably that the rest would be harmless.

8: Spittel D-8 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX8 Vedda AX8

2. VEDDA CHARACTERISTICS, RELIGION, AND SUPERSTITION

If 'tis not a true philosophy
That the spirit when set free,
Still lingers about its olden home,
In the flower and the tree,
It is very strange that our pulses thrill
At the sight of a voiceless thing,
And our hearts yearn so with tenderness
In the beautiful time of Spring.

N. P. WILLIS

241 THE genuine Vedda is a quite incompetent agriculturist; that is a mark
● 181 by which you may know him; and none are more so than the Veddas of Bingoda who can no more develop a *chena* than they can fly. They will make a fine beginning; valiantly fell trees and sow grain; but there it ends; whenever the mood seizes them they leave it all and go into the forest, and the wild animals wander in. This is why I consider the Veddas
[184] of Bingoda the most primitive I have met; better even than the classical Veddas of Henebedde and Danigala who are more of the agriculturist and less of the hunter.

221 Though these Veddas live close to Sinhalese settlements, they spend a
222 large part of their time in the jungle. When the forests have much to give—as in January and February, the good yam months, and June
·177 and July, the honey and fruits months—the Veddas take their families and forsake their huts for caves and stream-beds; here to-day, there to-morrow. But in times of jungle impoverishment—March to May, and September to December—they remain near the village, where at a pinch they can beg a pittance of grain; but even then foraging parties frequently wander forth and return in a few days with honey, flesh and swiftlets' nests for barter.

144 There is, almost certainly, no Vedda to-day without some trace of Sinhalese (or Tamil) blood in his veins; a reason why anthropometry is so often arid of results; still, one can usually tell a Vedda from a
142 Sinhalese at a glance: The sparsity of hair on the Vedda's face is his outstanding characteristic, in marked contrast to the heavily bearded Sinhalese; add to this a darker complexion, a shorter stature, a greater reserve, simplicity, and apathy, and an easily aroused ferocity of nature—
[826] and there is no more to be said. But Kaurala of Kotlinde would have it there was a further distinction: "See," said he, placing my hand on his Adam's apple. "I am a true Vedda; where is my throat-knot?"

181 Veddas are an independent folk. They are no respectors of persons; and if you wish to know them, it does not do to stand on your dignity. Displease them, and they will not come near you; treat them kindly and they are your good friends. Childish and ingenuous to a degree, they will address you on equal terms, and often show an embarrassing

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

familiarity savouring even of impudence and disrespect. But that is because they know no better. I have had a Vedda address me as "*tho*," a word now used only towards a very inferior person. A Vedda once took my gun and cartridge-bag to shoot us something for dinner. He returned empty-handed and disgruntled. I inquired what ailed him.

"What sort of cartridges are these?" he said, throwing down the bag contemptuously. "You fire at a wanderoo, and he sits and grins at you. You fire again, and he grins the more. You want six or seven big shot for animals, not *kurrukkan* grains."

I asked him how he knew the size of the shot in my cartridges. He answered that he had looked inside. It was not until the next day that I realised the thoroughness of his investigation. Every single cartridge in the bag, some fifty or more, had its wad at a rakish tilt! When I upbraided him for the liberty, he disarmed my wrath by laughing uproariously.

On one occasion we had pitched our tent under a big tree which caught fire through the carelessness of our cook who had pursued his occupation by its foot. As I lay in bed ignorant of a blazing branch overhead, I was warned repeatedly by the carriers of the danger of my position; but to these anxieties my tiredness made me deaf. "After to-night," said a Vedda, "no devil will be able to return to Colombo!" The words were electrical in effect—and in good time too, for the branch fell just as the tent was dismantled.

The quaintness of the Vedda language is always a delight. Not knowing the art of dissembling, they say just what they think. They are capable of exquisite and spontaneous similes and metaphors. Vulgarity is natural to them, and their talk is interlarded with phrases that would make a navvy blush.

I have said that a Vedda laughed uproariously. Now, it has been stated repeatedly, by persons professing to know all about Veddas, that these people are incapable of laughter. The statements have even gone to grotesque lengths as the sub-joined extract testifies.* When a

*THEY NEVER LAUGH

MOST SOLEMN TRIBES IN THE WORLD.

Laughter, and the faculty of being merry and bright, are gifts of the gods to a world in which there is not too much sunshine at any time.

But this gift, according to the scientists who know all about these subjects, has been denied to the Veddas, the aboriginal inhabitants of Ceylon. It is the only people in the world who never laugh, and in consequence they are thin and flabby folk, and a fat man among the Veddas would be an extraordinary sight for sad eyes. A traveller who has studied the early races in Ceylon gives some interesting particulars about this curious tribe.

For nearly 2000 years, according to the best chronicles, these people, now almost extinct, have preserved the same characteristics, and no one, so far as history reveals, has ever seen a smile on the face of one of them or heard a laugh while in their section of Ceylon.

Why these people do not smile is a mystery. They alone of all the people on the earth know nothing of the sensation of laughter.

A scientist, who recently journeyed to Ceylon for the purpose of investigating this question, persuaded some of them to permit him to tickle them in the ribs and in the middle of their feet with straws, and never caught even the flicker of a smile on their faces, nor did he ever succeed in making one of them squirm and laugh aloud during the operation.

(*Continued on next page*)

5: Spinel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

181 sophisticated Vedda knows what is expected of him he will act up to
152 the expectation right enough. Personally I have never yet met a Vedda who could not laugh. The truth is that the Vedda will laugh with the best of us when there is occasion; but he is a stranger to the conventional, hypocritical smile of civilisation, meant only to please and so uncertain an index of the heart. The Vedda's face, like a child's, is a mirror to his mind.

His natural expression is one of apathy and moroseness. Schooled to hardship and privation, he is neither greatly distraught by sorrow nor transported by joy He expresses his emotions with more moderation than we; he is the greater fatalist; and accepts with stoic equanimity the hard conditions of his life which have wrought into his expression a dour indifference, a decorous gravity.

There is something naturally fierce in his nature; and it does not do to anger him. The tradition is undoubtedly true that the Veddas, at one time, carried in their betel bags fragments of human liver which they chewed when roused, to give fire to their frenzy. And this is probably the origin of the Sinhalese threat, "I'll eat your liver!" There is a spot in the Eastern Province which commemorates to this
[173] day an early incident of colonisation: A Vedda had once way-laid and killed a European soldier, and going up to him could hear the ticking of his watch; examining this he said, "His life is still here," and dashed it to pieces on a rock.

When a Vedda returns from an expedition no one must speak to him until he has rested and it has pleased him to talk first. One who had accompanied us once on a hunt nearly killed a Sinhalese boy who innocently asked him what he had brought, the moment he arrived. Most sportsmen, Vedda or not, are impatient of cross-examination when fatigued—especially if unsuccessful.

771 The Veddas have no conception of a supreme being; nor have they any myth or theory bearing on cosmogony. The panorama of the heavens is beyond their questioning; but its supremacy is instinctively avowed: "*Mā Suriya Deyyo*" (by the Sun God) is an oath by which
195 the Vedda vouches his good faith.

776 Like animals, concerned only with their immediate needs, they take the world very much as they find it. But if the aloof heavens leave their imaginations untouched, not so their immediate environment. Here exist real powers more within the pale of their comprehension, influencing every act of their lives, overshadowing their credulous minds, and affording at least some data on which to found a faith. Is it surprising then that they people Nature with sentient beings, unseen, but very evident by their acts. And what spirits more comprehensible to the primitive mind, more inspiratory of faith and fear, than those of one's

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Another strange thing about the Veddas, and one which may possibly be connected with their lack of humour, is the fact that every one of them is a George Washington, unable to tell a lie or to conceive of anyone else telling a lie.

They cannot even believe that any one would take the property of anyone else, and association with civilisation has failed to convince them that it is possible.

With all this—or, rather without all this—the Veddas are a peaceable, gentle, quiet people. They take wives without any marriage ceremony, and are faithful and constant to them, supporting them to death.

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